

***NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE POLICY DIRECTIVE 31-105***  
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***Financial Management and Budget***

***CORRESPONDENCE***

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Subject: Correspondence

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This memo is to inform you of additional guidance and requirements recently issued by John J. Kelly, Deputy Under Secretary (DUS) for Oceans and Atmosphere, for preparing Secretarial and Under Secretary correspondence. A copy of the memo is attached. Items of particular importance in the attached memo from the DUS are timeliness and quality of responses. These need to improve. NOAA Executive Secretariat will track and monitor our performance and provide reports to the DUS. Any correspondence that is not delivered by the assigned due date will have to be explained in a lateness memo from the AA to the Secretary of Commerce or the DUS depending on who is to sign the letter. I don't plan on having to sign memos like this, so please adhere to the deadline.

All correspondence must address and respond to the issues raised in the incoming correspondence. I am requesting that you work with your staff to ensure that our responses are short, address the issues or questions raised and are written in plain English.

As a reminder, if you or your staff receive letters directly from Congress or other correspondence that the AA should sign, your first move is to get the letter to the Headquarters Correspondence Unit so it can be controlled.

The NOAA guidance also applies to letters addressed to the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries. Responses for all correspondence should be easy to understand (written in plain language), concisely address the major points or issues raised in the incoming correspondence, and go through the appropriate clearance process. NOAA Fisheries responds to a huge volume of correspondence every month, most of our responses are well crafted. However, I would like to reduce the number of letters that come to F for signature or clearance that are difficult to understand (too complex), too long, have obvious editorial mistakes, or that have not been routed through the correspondence unit.

Since the start of this Administration, NOAA Fisheries has done an excellent job in improving the timeliness and quality of our Secretarial correspondence - - these improvements have not gone unnoticed by me or NOAA. Adhering to these additional procedures and guidelines will allow us to continue to improve on our timeliness and responsiveness for Under Secretary and AA correspondence, all of which will improve our outreach to our constituents.

## **Correspondence**

### General Issues

- Sentences should be short, concise, and in the present tense.
- Letters should be one page unless an issue requires a significant explanation.
- Letters should not go to a second page with only a few lines and the signature line.
- Use of “I” words should be avoided if at all possible.
- Use “we” instead of “I” when addressing a NOAA issue. I should only be used for a personal response (i.e., I was glad we had an opportunity to meet at the summit).
- Limit the use of the word “that.”
- On letters being forwarded for the Secretary’s signature, the first line of each paragraph should be indented one tab (five spaces).

### Due Dates

- Due dates are important and must be met by those preparing documents and those reviewing documents.
- Any office not meeting the assigned due date is required to address a lateness memo to the Secretary for A-Priority documents or the Deputy Under Secretary for all other documents stating the reason for the delay. It is to be signed by the Assistant Administrator or the Staff Office Director.
- For documents in the clearance process, any office not meeting the due date will also submit a lateness memo.
- Stating someone is out of the office, and a response cannot be prepared, is not acceptable.
- Incorrect or incomplete packages returned by the Executive Secretariat will not be granted an extension of the due date.
- Once the package enters the review process from the Executive Secretariat, any delays resulting from the return of the package to the originating office will be addressed by the reviewing office in a lateness memo stating: what change was required, when it was returned to the originating office for correction, and the date the corrected version was received.
- An interim response will be required by the due date when a complete reply will be delayed for justifiable reasons.

### Cover Memos

- All documents forwarded to the Under Secretary should be submitted through the Executive Secretariat and have a cover memo.
- Memo should state the action required and why it is required. Stating you recommend the document be signed is not sufficient.
- The memo should contain a justification why requests in the incoming letter are not covered in the response.
- “Through” lines may be used on memos, however, it should not be spelled “Thru.”
- A-Priority correspondence must include pre-clearance from the Department’s Office of the General Counsel.